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Israelis Predicting Mass Immigration

DAVID LANDAU and
HUGH ORGEL

Israeli officials are revising upwards their estimates of how many Soviet Jews are expected to come to Israel in the next few years, now that the Soviet authorities are about to remove virtually all restrictions on emigration.

The assessments vary from reasonable projections to wishful thinking, but there is a consensus that all the resources of the state and the Jewish Agency for Israel must be mobilized for the huge absorption task ahead.

Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency Executive, addressed the subject at a meeting of the WZO Executive this week.

He said between 200,000 and 300,000 Soviet Jews will choose to settle in Israel in the next three years.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday that in the last month alone, 45,000 Soviet Jews initiated contact with the Israel government for the invita-

tions they need to apply for exit visas.

Dinitz told reporters in New York last week that Israel has received more than a million requests from Jews in the USSR for invitations to immigrate.

He said the numbers have increased since the change last month in U.S. policy that no longer grants refugee status to holders of Israeli visas.

Shamir reportedly said a half-million Soviet Jews were likely to seek to emigrate in the next two to three years. But he was not clear, in his presentation to the Knesset panel, how

Israel has received a million requests from Soviet Jews seeking immigration invitations.

many he expected would come to Israel.

On Tuesday, however, Shamir was certain that up to a million Jews would leave the USSR and many would come to Israel.

He offered that estimate at

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B'nai Moshe Lobbying For Reconsideration

SUSAN GRANT
Staff Writer

B'nai Moshe leaders hope a letter writing campaign will put enough pressure on West Bloomfield Township trustees to make them change their minds.

The synagogue planned to build a new facility on Drake Road south of Maple Road, but board trustees Sharon Law, Denise Hammond and Dennis Vatsis voted against it Nov. 20.

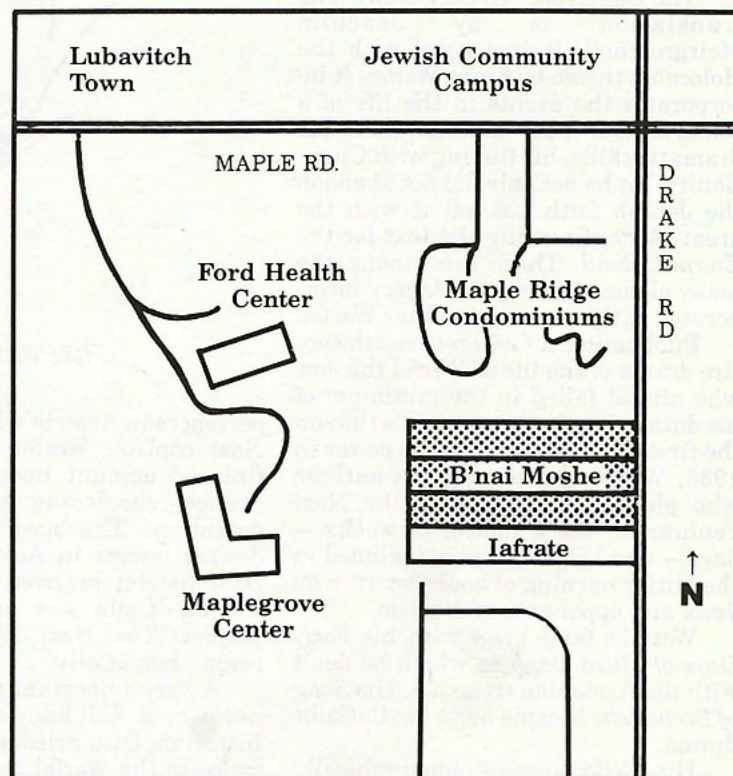
Since the defeat, synagogue representatives have worked to get one of the three trustees to reconsider their vote.

Former congregation president Robert Roth is setting up individual meetings with the three trustees and West Bloomfield Township Supervisor Sandra Draur, who abstained because she did not know enough about the proposal.

Roth expects to know by next week whether a reconsideration will be granted.

"Only if the reconsideration process is unsuccessful" will the synagogue consider "legal remedies," Roth said.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Draur received a hand-



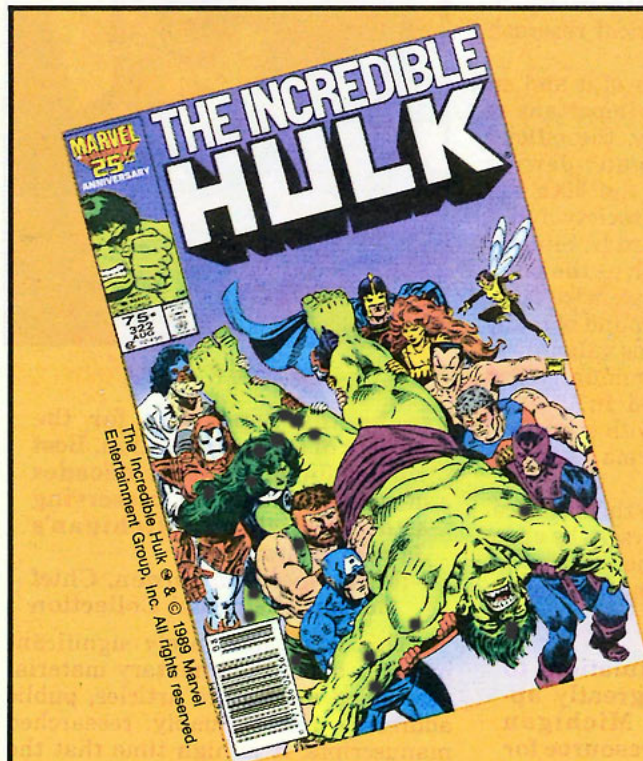
delivered letter from Suzanne Glagola. She and her husband, Michael, own 10 acres of the 15-acre parcel that B'nai Moshe intends to purchase.

Law voted against the B'nai Moshe proposal for a variety of reasons, including traffic and parking concerns.

The synagogue will bring more people "to an area where traffic is already horrendous on a Saturday," she said.

She also did not think the proposed synagogue parking was adequate and would force B'nai Moshe members

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CLOSE-UP

SECRET IDENTITIES



The real-life faces behind the masks of comic books' greatest superheroes.

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SECRET IDENTITIES



*The real-life faces behind
the masks of comic books'
greatest superheroes.*

MICHAEL WEISS

Special to The Jewish News

Rocketed to Earth from the doomed planet Krypton by his parents Jor-El and Lara, young Kal-El was adopted and raised by kindly John and Martha Kent. They named the infant Clark, taught him virtue, ethics, and a respect for truth, justice and the American way. Gaining fabulous superpowers under Earth's lesser gravity and yellow sun, Kent vowed to use his abilities for good, gaining fame and renown as the world's greatest superhero — Superman!

Unbelievable? Then try this: Created in the mid-1930s by two Jewish kids from Cleveland, Superman languished in publication limbo until 1939, when he was finally purchased by a fledgling publishing company looking for something different to launch its new title, *Action Comics*. That first appearance spawned dozens of spin-offs, hundreds of imitations and a new art form that has today developed into a \$275 million industry.

Welcome to the wonderful world of comic book superheroes: a world where with one magic word Billy Batson could become Captain Marvel, where a bite from a radioactive spider could change meek Peter Parker into the spectacular Spiderman, and where any kid from the Bronx (or Cleveland, or Detroit) could change a brightly colored fantasy into a profitable career.

The comic book was born in 1935 with a publication of *Famous Funnies*, a magazine-sized reprint collection of daily newspaper comic strips. Clearly, the supply of newspaper strips would not last forever, and so the first original comic book material soon appeared on the scene.

It wasn't until the appearance of Superman in 1939, however, that the comic book really took off. Created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, the first issue sold out almost immediately nationwide. Suddenly, an entire generation of artists discovered a new storytelling medium.

One of those artists was Jacob Kurtzberg, who was then drawing newspaper editorial cartoons under the

name Jack Kirby. In his 50-year-long career, Kirby was involved in the creation of almost every major character in comics, including Captain America, Spiderman and the Hulk.

"I first met (former partner) Joe Simon just as *Superman* came out," Kirby recalls. "It was an instant hit. Publishers suddenly came out of nowhere, all wanting someone to create another Superman. Together, Joe and I came up with Captain America."

Captain America was born in 1941, as the nation stood at the brink of war.

"There was a tremendous search for villains at that time," Simon recalls. "That was when (Batman's nemesis) the Joker was created. Jack and I took a look at the world and decided that Adolf Hitler had to be the ultimate villain."

"Once we had our villain, it became a matter of creating a patriotic hero to fight him."

The Simon-Kirby team soon became as well-known to fans as the Siegel-Shuster team. But these four weren't the only young Jews making their mark in the growing industry. During the first quarter-century of the comic book industry's existence, virtually every major figure in either the creative or business end was Jewish.

Consider just a partial list of Jewish comic book figures: Simon and Kirby; Siegel and Shuster; Bob Kane, creator of Batman; Will Eisner, creator of the Spirit, Uncle Sam and Plastic Man; Alfred Harvey, founder of Harvey Comics, home of Casper the friendly ghost and Richie Rich; and Julius Schwartz, known as the "father of science-fiction comics."

In fact, 45-year comic veteran Gil Kane remembers, "It seemed like almost every guy I knew in the field back then was Jewish. The few exceptions were all Italian."

What brought so many young urban Jews to comics? In part, Kane says, it was because of the large number of Jews in the publishing business.

"Most of the early comic book people came out of the publishing houses, and all of the publishing companies in New York were predominantly Jewish," he says.



Captain America TM & (c)1989 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Inked by Jack Milgrom. Created by Simon and Kirby.



Location also played a role. The comic book was born in New York City, and because the industry was so new, it was wide open to the children of immigrants, particularly those on the Lower East Side.

"It never really occurred to me that there were an inordinate amount of Jews in the business, although in retrospect I can see that," says Jack Abel, now staff proofreader at Marvel Comics. "But then it just seemed like we were all New York guys. Kids growing up in New York saw themselves as comic book artists and gravitated toward that."

Abel never thought he would end up in comics professionally.



Will Eisner: "Everything I do, write or draw has a Jewish side to it."

professionally. "Like anybody who could draw as a kid, I used to draw cartoons," he recalls.

"After I got out of the Navy, it didn't seem wise to pursue a career in art. But I didn't get anywhere else. So finally I went back to art school, and soon I landed my first job at Fox Features, which is now defunct. I would walk around with samples to the various publishing houses, and soon I was supporting myself."

Between 1956 and 1967, Abel pencilled and inked war stories for the industry's giant, DC Comics. Toward the end of this period, he also inked *Iron Man* at Marvel Comics, DC's up-and-coming competition down the block. In 1968, he began working on *Superman* and the *Legion of Super Heroes* for DC, and in 1971 he jumped full-time to Marvel, where he has remained to this day.

Gil Kane grew up when the age of radio adventure heroes was in flower. Raised on a steady diet of Tom Mix and

Lone Ranger, when the first tear-sheet comic books were printed, Kane became a regular customer. By 1939, he says, "I was indoctrinated by Flash Gordon and Mandrake."

Kane began bringing his samples to the publishing houses when he was 15. At 16, he was hired for his first job at M.L.J. studios, now known as Archie Comics, where he created *The Shield* and *The Wizard*. About seven months later, he began working with Simon and Kirby.

Kane's career was temporarily interrupted when he entered the service in 1944. After the war, he began working for DC Comics, where he remained until the mid-1960s, when he moved to Marvel.

Kane now lives in California, where he has just completed a four-book graphic novel adaptation of Wagner's *Ring of the Niebelung* for DC — a far cry from the simplistic action-adventure of his youth.

The early years of comics saw the creation of what are now familiar genres to all: romance comics, mystery comics, military comics, crime comics — and, of course, the superhero.

"I think there's a cultural thread underlying the superhero concept," says Will Eisner, whose *The Spirit* is still being reprinted more than 45 years after its creation.

"The superhero has his origins in the folk hero. He represents an attempt to deal with forces that are considered otherwise undefeatable, and that ties in somehow with the *n'shama* of the Jewish people. Although we may have thought we were creating Aryan characters, with non-Jewish names like Bruce Wayne, Clark Kent and my own Denny Colt, I think we were responding to an inner *n'shama* that responds to forces around us — just like the story of the golem in Jewish lore."

"If you think about it," Eisner says, "all of Jewish cultural history has been based around Jewish cultural fighters, like Samson and David. In the 1940s, we were facing the Nazis, an apparently unstoppable force. And what better way to deal with a supervillain like Hitler than with a superhero?"

Regardless of how Jewish

the underlying themes of the comic books may have been, until very recently outwardly Jewish characters have been all but nonexistent.

"Most of us, at the time, were trying to 'pass.' That was the thing to do," Eisner says.

"As a rule, we tended to try to keep our culture out of our work," Abel agrees. "But you could say the same thing about the Catholics in the business. You never saw an Italian character, for example."

That is changing. While Jewish comic book characters are still underrepresented, there are a few notable exceptions.

At 7'6" (with an optional additional 3"), Nuklon is one of the most powerful members of the team called Infinity, Inc. But beneath the face mask, skintight costume and flaming red mohawk haircut, he's really just Al Rothstein, a nice Jewish boy who spends Chanukah with his widowed mother, and who recently celebrated his bar mitzvah in a flashback sequence.

And when Wonder Woman chose a delegation of the first outsiders to set foot on her native Paradise Island, Rabbi

Benjamin Hecht was included among the statesmen and ambassadors.

Even Petey, the extra-dimensional demon-with-a-heart-of-gold-in-the-shape-of-a-talking-English-bulldog in the humor/horror comic *Dr. Fate*, speaks with a Yiddish accent that would make Sholom Aleichem proud.

Ironically, as Jewish influences find their way into the stories, their influence behind the drawing board is fading. As Jews moved out of the inner city, the industry opened up to a broader range of influences.

"Today we're seeing a lot of black and Hispanic creators, for the same reason it used to be Jews and Italians," says Al Milgrom, an artist for Marvel Comics.

Milgrom, a native of Huntington Woods and a graduate of the University of Michigan, began working in comics in 1972 as an assistant to Superman artist Murphy Anderson. The relationship led to more jobs, filling in for inkers with deadline problems, and by 1973 he landed his first steady job, inking *Captain Marvel* and *Master of Kung Fu* for Marvel.

In 1977 he moved back to DC, where he edited and

created several titles under the period of mass expansion called "The DC Explosion." When the explosion died out, Milgrom found himself out of a job and returned to Marvel.

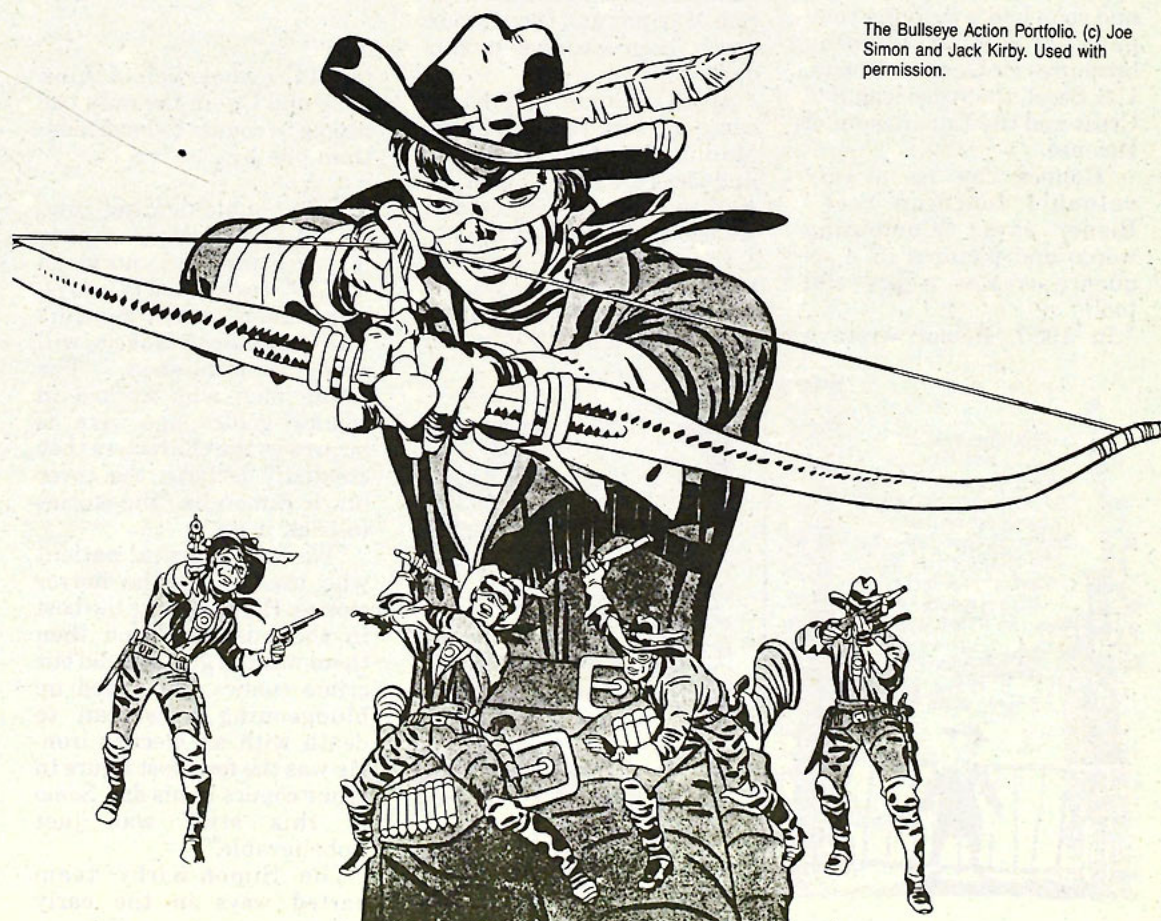
Milgrom says he avoids putting Judaism in his work. "If you use stereotypical Jewish traits, you get letters complaining," he explains.

Eisner has no such concerns. As the owner of his own studio in Florida, he has no one to answer to but the

'In the 1940s, we were facing the Nazis, an apparently unstoppable force. And what better way to deal with a supervillain like Hitler than with a superhero?'

marketplace, and, in his words, "a little Yiddishkeit never hurt."

Eisner's 1977 graphic novel *A Contract With God* was one of the first attempts to deal with serious adult themes on a mature level. The portrait of urban life in the 1930s and



The Bullseye Action Portfolio. (c) Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Used with permission.



early 1940s was a smash in critical circles, but commercially received only mild attention.

Undaunted, Eisner continues to experiment with the medium.

"My entire life has been devoted to experimentation with the art form, which still hasn't reached maturity. Today, the very word 'comic' is a misnomer, because most of what's out there is not meant to make you laugh, but to make you think," he says.

Even in the 1930s, Eisner knew he was in the minority. "Most cartoonists did not regard comics as a literary form, as I did. They were looked on as entertainment. Comics were junk food, and the comic artists were *untermenschen* — even the daily strip artists looked down on us."

Eisner differed from his colleagues in other ways as well. Unlike most cartoonists of the time, who sold their copyrights to the syndicates, Eisner insisted on keeping all rights to his work.

From the mid-1940's to the early 1970s, Eisner abandoned the world of entertainment comics to experiment with other applications of the medium. He was a pioneer in industrial and commercial applications of comic strips, and soon had a thriving company producing training brochures for General Motors, U.S. Steel, the American Red Cross and the Department of Defense.

"Comics can be a very valuable teaching tool," Eisner says. "Combining words and pictures in a sequence creates a powerful tool."

In 1980, Eisner wrote a

landmark textbook, *Comics and Sequential Art*, now in its fifth edition. The book is used not only in art schools, but also in film classes in many universities, Eisner says.

Today, Eisner teaches at the School of Visual Arts, producing graphic novels and experimenting with new applications of the medium.

"I'm working on a project aimed at the literacy problem," he says. "There are some exciting possibilities of using television applications."

Simon also dabbled in other applications of the medium. While in the Coast Guard, he was sent to Washington, D.C., to do comic books and strips rather than being shipped overseas.

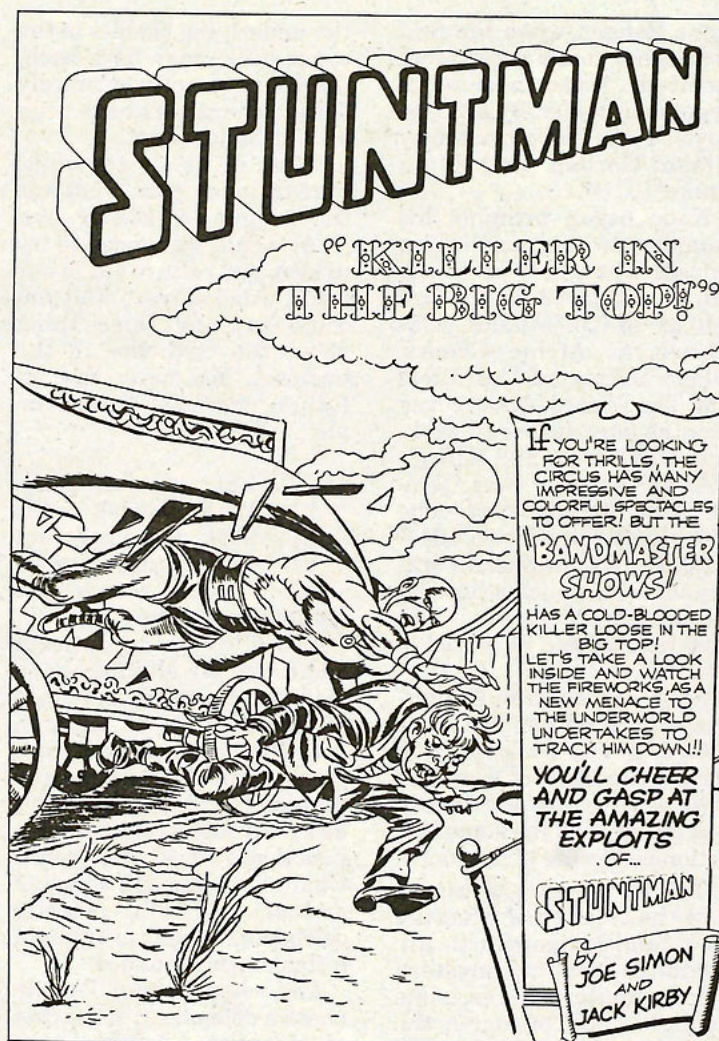
"The Coast Guard Academy wanted me to do a recruiting book in comics," he says. "I got a commendation for that."

But Simon's greatest successes have been the enduring characters he created with his partner, Jack Kirby. While *Captain America* was being published by Timely Comics (which later evolved into Marvel), DC was publishing *Boy Commandos*, one of the most popular comics of the war years.

Simon didn't abandon Timely; he continued to edit the entire line of superheroes, including characters like the Sub-Mariner and the Human Torch, both favorites to this day.

At DC, Simon and Kirby came up with the Sandman, Manhunter, the Guardian, and the Newsboy Legion, as well as their most successful creation, *Young Romance*.

Young Romance was our biggest hit," Simon says. "It was the first romance comic, and it lasted for 10 years on



(c)Joe Simon and Jack Kirby. Used with permission.

top of the whole field. I think Jack and I were the only two people in comics to have more than one hit."

Double-dealing and copyright fights were the norm in those early days, says Simon, whose memoirs *The Comic Book Makers*, will soon be published. "The young men who worked in comics' golden age were as bizarre as the characters they created," declares the cover blurb. Simon has the stories to back it up.

"We had a mental patient who used to do the horror stories. He was about the best in the business. And then there was the guy who did our crime comics. He ended up bludgeoning a woman to death with an electric iron. He was the foremost figure in crime comics in his day. Some of this stuff was just unbelievable."

The Simon-Kirby team parted ways in the early

"The superhero has his origins in the folk hero. He represents an attempt to deal with forces that are considered otherwise undefeatable, and that ties in somehow with the n'shama of the Jewish people."

1950s. "Joe went on to commercial art, and I felt that anything other than comics was not storytelling," Simon says.

Kirby says he went back and forth between the two major houses, creating *The Challengers of the Unknown* for DC before settling in at Marvel, where he played a vital role in the creation of what was known as the Marvel Age. New characters like Spiderman, Iron Man, The Hulk, Fantastic Four and the Black Panther (the first black superhero) added an element of pathos and humanity to the world of superheroics.

In the late 1960s, Kirby returned amid much fanfare to DC, where he introduced the counterculture to mainstream comics and created an entire modern mythology in *The New Gods*.

"All of my characters are based on real people," Kirby says. "Darkseid (the villain of *The New Gods*) is the man we never see, the man who runs things. He's not exactly a god, but a super-businessman."

"Captain America was me, and I was Captain America. I saw him as part of me, and he always will be. In the fight scenes, when Cap used to take on seven men at once and five bodies would fly around the room while he punched two in the jaw — that's how I remember the street fights from my childhood."

"Jewish kids then were raised with a belief in moral values. In the movies, good always triumphed over evil. Underneath all of the sophistication of modern comics, all the twists and psychological drama, good triumphs over evil."

"Those are the things I learned from my parents and from the Bible. It's part of my Jewish heritage," Kirby says.

"I'm part of a generation that was very conscious of our Jewishness, but we were not Jewish scholars," Eisner adds. "As time went on, I developed a strong Jewish identity. I read as much about Jewish things as I can. Right now, I'm working through Maimonides and through Paul Johnson's *History of the Jews*."

"If you scratch through the surface, everything I do, write or draw has a Jewish side to it." □

(c)1985 Will Eisner Studios

